

# TRUXTON KING

By GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON.

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## CHAPTER XX. THE LAST STAND.

SOON after 5 o'clock a man in the topmost window of the tower called down that the forces in the hills were moving in a compact body toward the ridges below the southern gates.

One hundred picked men were to be left inside the castle gates with Vos Engo, prepared to meet any flank movement that might be attempted. Three hundred mounted men were selected to make the dash down Castle avenue straight into the camp of the sharpshooters. It was the purpose of the house guards to wage a fierce and noisy conflict off the avenue and then retire to the castle as abruptly as they left it, to be ready for Marlanx should he decide to make a final desperate effort to seize their stronghold.

The dash of the 300 through the gates and down the avenue was the most spectacular experience in Truxton's life. He was up with Quinnox and General Brax, galloping well in front of the yelling troops. These mounted carbiniers, riding as Bedouins, swept like thunder down the street, whirled into the broad, open arena beyond the duke's palace and were upon the surprised ruffians before they were fully awake to the situation.

They came tumbling out of barns and sheds, clutching their rifles in nerveless hands, aghast in the face of absolute destruction. The enemy, craven at the outset, threw down their guns and tried to escape through the alleys and side streets at the end of the common. Firing all the time, the attacking force rode them down as if they were so many dogs.

After ten or fifteen minutes of this desultory carnage it was reported that a large force of men were entering the avenue from Regenetz's circus. Quinnox sent his chargers toward this great horde of foot soldiers, but they did not falter, as he had expected. On they swept, 2,000 or 3,000 of them. At their head rode five or six officers. The foremost was Count Marlanx.

Quinnox saw now that the Iron Count was determined to storm the gates and gave the command to retreat. Waving their rifles and shouting defiance over their shoulders, the dragons drew up, wheeled and galloped toward the gates.

Scarcely were the massive portals closed and the great steel bars dropped into place by the men who attended them when a low, dull explosion shook the earth as if by volcanic force. Then came the crashing of timbers, the cracking of masonry, the whirring of a thousand missiles through the air. Before the very eyes of the stunned, bewildered defenders, dismounting near the parade ground, the huge gates and pillars fell to the ground.

The gates had been dynamited. Then it was that Truxton King remembered. Marlanx's sappers had been quietly at work for days drilling

from the common to the gates. It was a strange coincidence that Marlanx should have chosen this day for his culminating assault on the castle. The skirmish at daybreak had hurried his arrangements no doubt, but none the less were his plans complete. The explosives had been laid during the night. The fuses reached to the mouth of the tunnel across the common. As he swept up the avenue at the head of his command, hawk faced and with glittering eyes, he snarled the command that put fire to the fuses.

A moment later his vanguard streamed through the aperture and faced the deadly fire from the driveway.

At last they began to advance across the grassy meadow. When one man fell under the fire of the guardsmen another rushed into his place. Three times the indomitable Graustarkins drove them back and as often did Marlanx drag them up again, exalted by the example he set.

"God, he is a soldier!" cried Truxton. "Hello! There's my friend Brutus. He's no coward either. Here's a try for you, Brutus!"

He dropped to his knees and took deliberate aim at the frenzied headdress. The discovery that there were three bullets in Brutus' breast when he was picked up long afterward did not affect the young man's contention that his was the one that had found the heart.

The fall of Brutus urged the Iron Count to greater fury. His horse had been shot from under him. He was on his feet, calling to his men to follow him as he moved toward the stubborn row of green and red. Bullets hissed about his ears, but he gave no heed to them.

The commander of the guard gave the command to fall back slowly toward the castle.

Firing at every step, they crossed the parade ground and then made a quick dash for the shelter of the long balconies. Marlanx, down in the parade ground, was fairly pushing his men into the jaws of death.

Truxton King's chance to pay his

debt to Vos Engo came after one of the fiercest, most determined charges. The young count had been fighting desperately for some time. His weakness seemed to have disappeared. As the foe fell back in the face of desperate resistance Vos Engo sprang down the steps and rushed after them, calling others to join him in the attempt to complete the rout. Near the edge of the terrace he stopped. His leg gave way under him, and he fell to the ground. Truxton saw him fall.

He leaped over the low balustrade, dropping his hot rifle, and dashed across the terrace to his rival's assistance. A hundred men shot at him.

"It's my turn!" shouted the American. "I'll square it up if I can. Then we're even!"

He seized the wounded man in his strong arms, threw him over his shoulder and staggered toward the steps. "Release me, curse you!" shrieked Vos Engo, striking his rescuer in the face with his fist.

"I'm saving you for another day," said King as he dropped behind the balustrade with his burden safe.

There were other witnesses to Truxton's rash act. In a lofty window of the north wing crouched a white faced girl and a grim old man. The latter held a rifle in his tense though feeble old hands. Now and then the old man would sight his rifle and fire. The girl who crouched beside him was there to designate a certain figure in the ever changing mass of humanity on the bloody parade ground. Her clear eyes sought far and found Marlanx; her unwavering finger pointed him out to the old marksman.

She saw Vos Engo fall. Then a tall, well known figure sprang into view, dashing toward her wounded lover. Her heart stopped beating. With her hands to her temples she leaned far over the window ledge and



"YOU ARE SHOT!" SHE CRIED. "TRUXTON! TRUXTON!"

screamed—screamed words that would have filled Truxton King with an endless joy could he have heard them, above the rattle of the rifles.

The corner of the building had shut out the picture. It was impossible for her to know that the man and his burden had reached the balcony in safety. Even now they might be lying on the terrace, riddled by bullets.

The old man roused her from the stupor of dread. He called her name. Dully she responded. Standing bolt upright in the window, she sought out the figure of Marlanx and pointed rigidly.

"Ah," groaned the old man, "they will not be driven back this time!

They will not be denied. It is the last charge! God, how they come! Our men will be annihilated in—Where is he? Now! Ah, I see! Yes that is he! He is near enough now. I cannot miss him!"

Marlanx was leading his men up to the terrace.

At the top of the terrace the Iron Count suddenly stopped. His long body stiffened and then crumpled like a reed. A score of heavy feet trampled on the fallen leader, but he did not feel the impact.

A bullet from the north wing had crashed into his brain.

"At last!" shrieked the old man at the window. "Come, Miss Tullis; my work is done."

"He is dead, your grace?" in low, awed tones.

"Yes, my dear," said the Duke of Perse, a smile of relief on his face. "Come, let me escort you to the prince. You have been most courageous."

A group of terrified women were huddled in the far corner of a nearby room. The Duke of Perse held open the door for Lorraine Tullis, but she did not enter. When he turned to call she was halfway down the top flight of stairs, racing through the powder smoke toward the landing below.

At every step she was screaming in the very agony of gladness: "Stand firm! Hold them! Help is coming! Help is coming!"

A last look through the window at the end of the hall had revealed to her the most glorious of visions.

Red and green troops were pouring through the dismantled gateway, their horses surging over the ugly ground rifts and debris as if possessed of the fabled wings.

Her brother was out there, and all was well. She was crying the joyous news from the head of the grand stairway when Truxton King caught sight of her.

He was powder stained and grimy. There was blood on his face and shirt front.

"You are shot!" she cried, clutching the post at the bend in the stairs. "Truxton! Truxton!"

"Not even scratched!" he shouted

as he reached her side. "It's not my turn!" He stopped short even as he held out his arms to clasp her to his breast. "It's some one else's blood," he finished resolutely. She swayed toward him, and he caught her in his arms.

"I love you—oh, I love you, Truxton!" she cried over and over again. He was faint with joy. His kisses spoke the adoration he would have cried out to her if emotion had not clogged his throat.

"Eric," she whispered at last, drawing back in his arms and looking up into his eyes with a great pity in her own. "Is he—is he dead, Truxton?"

"No," he said gently; "badly hurt, but—"

"He will not die! Thank God, Truxton. He is a brave—oh, a very brave man!"

Leaderless between the deadly fires, the mercenaries gave up the fight after a brief stand at the terrace.

The prince reigned again.

(To Be Continued.)

### Probate Court.

Estate of Eli Halsey, insane—Citation to heirs.

Estate of Herman Lawrentz—Order for sale of real property.

Estate of Ernest Burch—Inventory and appraisement filed and approved.

Estate James McDonald—Same order.

Estate John T. Layton—Seventh semi-annual statement filed and approved.

Estate of James B. Rodgers, C. O. Rodgers appointed administrator; Monroe Gordon, H. I. Pelton, Elbert Glass, appraisers.

Estate W. H. Norman—H. J. Taylor appointed administrator; John Sisty, Oscar Blackford, William Leathers, appraisers.

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10

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Girl for the country, \$25, four in family, adults.

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**No. 15—80 ACRES**—Black loam, fine for garden, corn or fruit; 14 acres in cultivation, balance oak and laurel wood; on creek; 4-room house, barn, chicken house and corn crib; good well, three-quarters mile to school, 2 1/2 miles to postoffice, 9 miles to station; \$1000 takes this.

**No. 43—FINE** vacant lot, 50x210 feet, on east side; best of garden soil. Price \$500, terms. It is worth more.

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